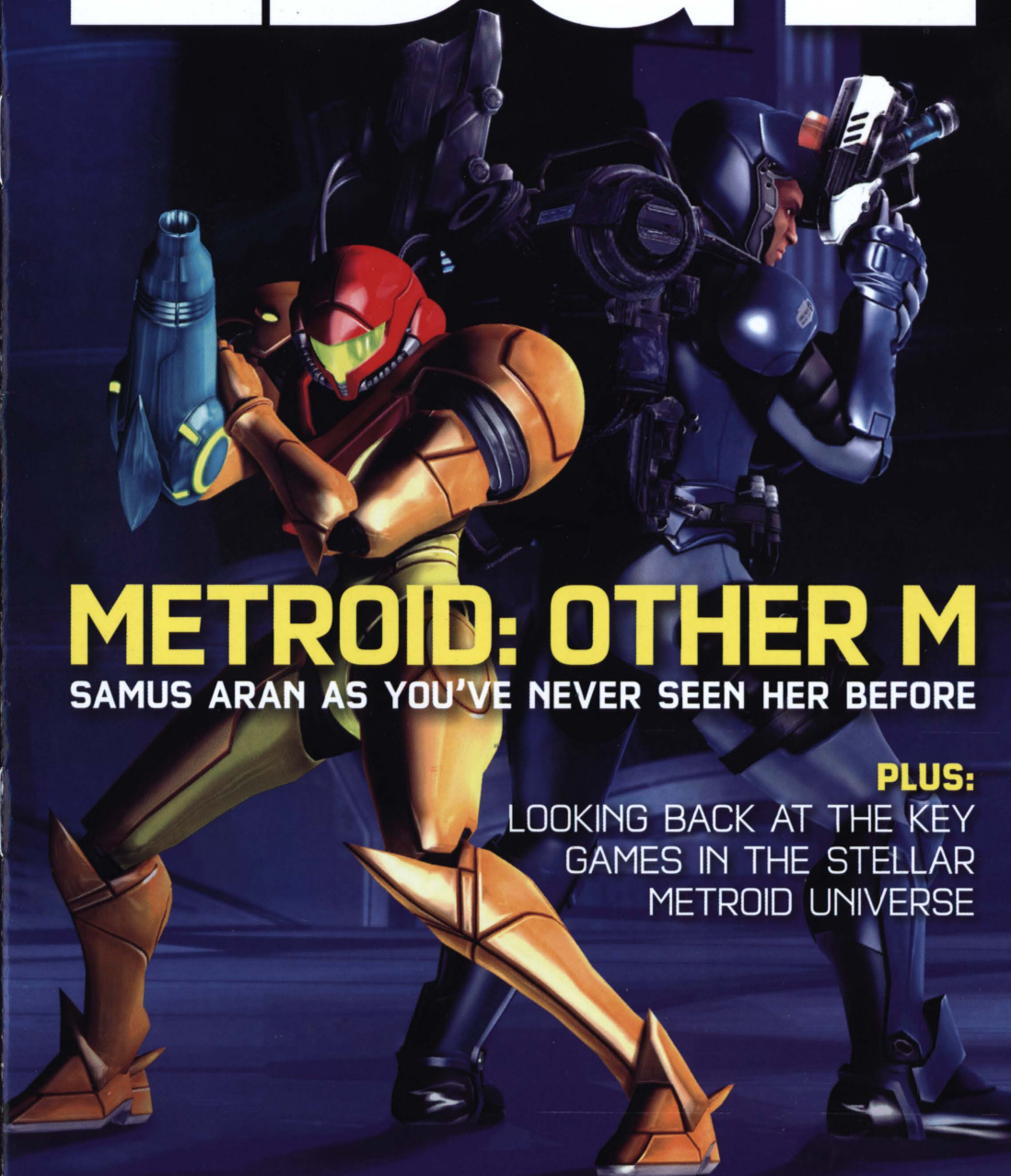


VIDEOGAME CULTURE

METROID SPECIAL

EDGE[®]



METROID: OTHER M

SAMUS ARAN AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN HER BEFORE

PLUS:

LOOKING BACK AT THE KEY
GAMES IN THE STELLAR
METROID UNIVERSE

future360°

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EDGE MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED
BY FUTURE PUBLISHING

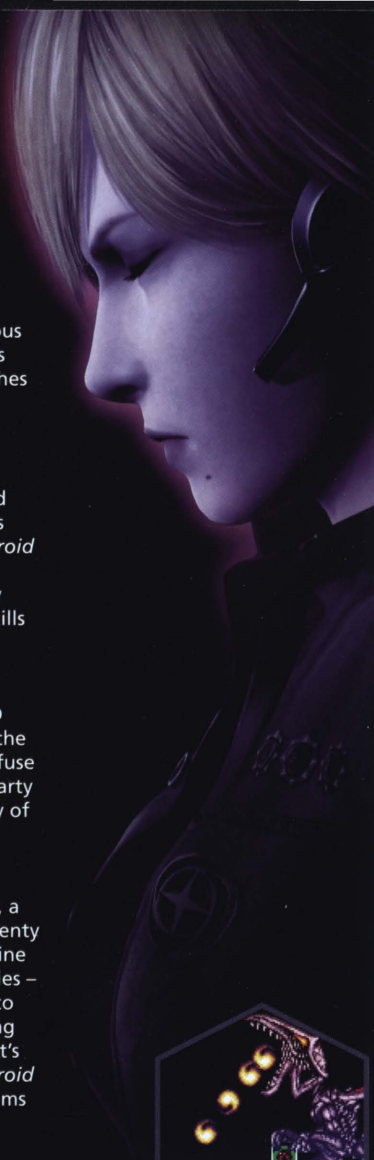
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For three decades of Nintendo consoles and across the known universe, there have been Metroids. Bioweapons of vicious intelligence, relentless hunters with voracious appetites, leeches that feed on life energy. Bogeymen for everyone – bar Samus Aran, the bounty hunter out to stop them.

Since its debut in 1986, and from labyrinthine 2D corridors to sumptuous 3D worlds, *Metroid* has been Nintendo's supreme space opera. Deep in the belly of the beast, improving her skills and upgrading the Varia suit, Samus is at home.

Metroid: Other M is all of this – a combination of the 2D exploration and 3D precision the series has perfected across diffuse games. It also introduces a hearty melee combat system courtesy of co-developer Team Ninja.

Surely the most intriguing aspect of *Other M* is its relationship to *Super Metroid*, a series high point. There are plenty of those, and here we'll examine the history of the *Metroid* series – from those first 2D footsteps to the exceptional 3D reimagining of *Prime* – and the standards it's set for *Other M*, the new *Metroid* Wii game, and the one that aims to bring them all together.



Metroid

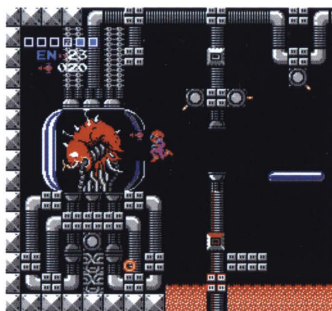
FORMAT: NES DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: 1986

The original *Metroid*'s combination of 2D platforming and winding maps created a new subgenre, and a new world for Nintendo: the muted gloom of space, tightly closed doors and things scuttling in the dark, the thrill of close-quarters space combat.

The acrobatics and gunplay were great arcade tools – yet you often didn't need them, relying instead on mental gymnastics. Was that door this way or that? Where did I last turn here? What else is out there? All the while, the signature ability that allowed Samus to turn into a morph ball and squeeze through gaps piles on the sense of claustrophobia.

Remembered as one of the first videogames with a female lead, *Metroid* saved that surprise

for the end. Like every other element that has come to define the series – the intricate crossword puzzle of the world, the sinister *Metroids* lurking below, the loneliness that occasionally taps you on the shoulder – it's kind of a secret. Just not a very well-kept one.



The final battle of *Metroid* (left), which sees Samus face down Mother Brain, remains a touchstone for the series, and the game is now available to enjoy on the Wii's Virtual Console

Metroid II: Return Of Samus

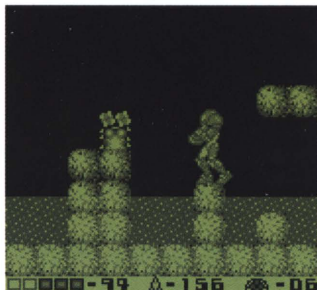
FORMAT: GAME BOY DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: 1991

It would be five years before *Metroid*'s sequel appeared. Following the events of the first game, the Galactic Federation decides *Metroids* are too dangerous to live. Samus Aran, one of the only humans to have survived contact with them, is hired for the job.

Metroid II sees the bounty hunter show her true mettle. Exploration is downplayed in favour of a pure hunt, and Samus' abilities increase dramatically. Plasma beams that can penetrate walls, spread shots for busy rooms and a new wall-crawling morph ball were added to an armoury that wasn't short of firepower already.

Metroid II is to *Metroid* as *Aliens* is to *Alien*. The bottom of the screen shows only your

energy, missile stock, and how many *Metroids* remain alive – as you hunt down more, you begin to see new evolutionary stages. The most careful consideration was given to its platform and how that should influence the game's structure: a principle that has served the series well ever since.



Samus is proportionally larger on the small Game Boy screen, but a more important factor is her expanded repertoire of abilities



Super Metroid

FORMAT: SNES DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: 1994

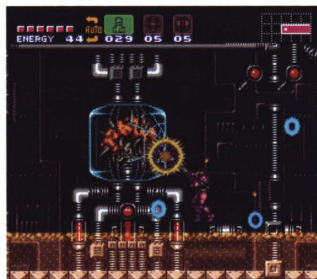
Super Metroid begins with the last Metroid in captivity and the galaxy at peace. Not for long. In a remarkable opening, Ridley assaults the space station and kills the scientists holding the hatchling; after a brief skirmish with Samus, they both escape as the station blows. Landing on a rebuilt and re-engineered Zebes, the first game's setting, Samus sets out to recover the hatchling before it can be cloned.

The real story of the Metroid games is how Samus' abilities – and the capabilities of the player – increase throughout, always tempting backtracking even as they drive you onwards. Super Metroid's greatest tool is its environment: landing on Zebes, a thunderstorm and damp grass

lead to a single entrance going inexorably downwards. Reaching the bottom, you stand in the smashed shell of Mother Brain, her defence system lying in pieces, the calcified remains of an old battle.

Super Metroid truly begins at this point, with an army of Space Pirates and their grotesque commanders repopulating Zebes and blocking the path to Ridley. Beginning the game with minimal abilities, Samus is soon enough blazing through the planet's interior, powered-up and capable of defeating anything in her path.

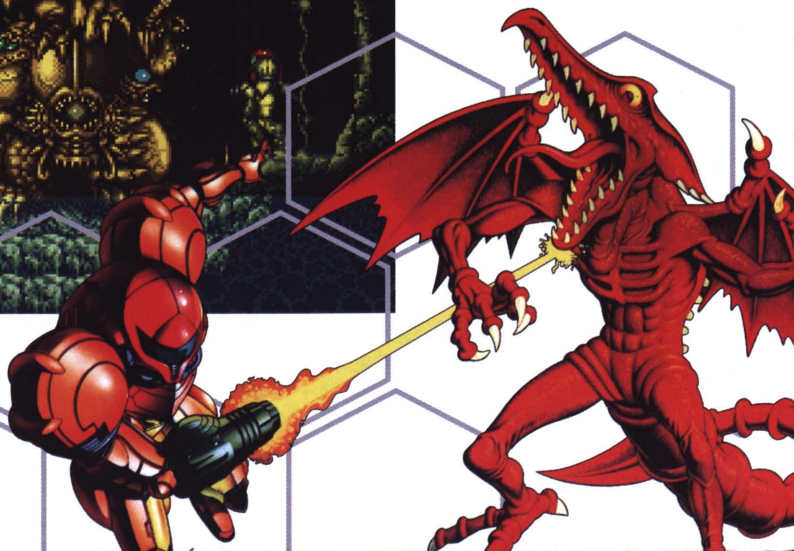
The architecture of Zebes, its small rooms and long corridors to be explored at will, has its own presence. A mournful soundscape underpins your



The cybernetic Mother Brain, seemingly destroyed in the first game, returns – but she doesn't remain in her original form for long

trawling, as oozing and sluggish musical pieces circle on themselves, accompanied by tiny snicks and shuffles from the planet's inhabitants. This is how Metroid is supposed to be.

A masterpiece in terms of structure, the game also unfolds a narrative that is the quintessential Metroid tale. Super Metroid is available on Virtual Console now, and there's no better preparation for Other M, its direct sequel, than enjoying the 1994 game's rare craftsmanship and sense of place.





The X-parasites are organic nasties that bond with other organisms, which almost inevitably results in something horrible



Metroid Fusion

FORMAT: GAME BOY ADVANCE DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: 2002

As Nintendo's handheld upgraded, so did Samus, her original armour replaced with a suit infused with Metroid DNA. And the rainbow colour scheme wasn't the only new trick on offer.

Samus begins *Metroid Fusion* even more powerless than in previous adventures. Pacing through a space station infected by X Parasites, the destroyers of her original suit and the Metroids' purest enemy, she's stalked by the SA-X, a super-

powered hunter made in her mirror image.

Fusion also introduced Adam, Samus' commanding officer, who helped guide her through the mess of the Biologic Laboratories space station. Upgrading and taking out the bigger enemies, you're always avoiding the biggest one of all – until you're good and ready. A game of hunt and be hunted, *Metroid Fusion's* eye for set-pieces and twisting interiors are a key legacy to *Metroid: Other M*.



It's important not to mistake *Zero Mission* for a simple graphical overhaul. The structure of the map is altered and new areas are added, as well as a playable postscript to the game

Metroid: Zero Mission

FORMAT: GAME BOY ADVANCE DEVELOPER: NINTENDO RELEASE: 2004

The impossible mission statement: the original, but better. The GBA hardware played host to a reimagining of the first game in the series, incorporating almost every improvement the *Metroid* team had delivered since.

Though a game of simple elements, the original *Metroid's* triumph was in their combination. With *Zero Mission*, that impeccable foundation was layered with almost two decades of refinement: Samus' abilities are total, the levelling of her suit perfectly managed, with subtle techniques rewarding master players endlessly. This Zebes is one that turns in on itself, with secret shortcuts and tricks toying with the original design.

Its influence on *Other M* can't be underestimated – not least as the most recent 2D entry in the series. Its winning blend of old and new, as well as fleshing out the role of Ridley and the Space Pirates – with a new twist along the way – makes *Zero Mission* the culmination of *Metroid* in 2D, and a series highlight.





Metroid Prime

FORMAT: GAMECUBE DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS RELEASE: 2002

Metroid Prime was a landmark videogame, a new type of firstperson experience that valued agility and brains as much as a quick trigger finger, placing brawn on a par with brains.

Not that it's short of a laser blast or two. Among its finest achievements was a toggling aim that worked within the firstperson viewpoint to create a visceral, frantic combat system unlike any other, presented through a HUD of

exceptional style. Its multi-level environments were home to pitched battles, but they were never simple arenas: as ever, an interlacing set of objectives pulled Samus back and forth across the planet of Tallon IV.

In the process, the origin story of the Chozo, the creators of the Metroids, unfolds. As more of an archaeologist than ever before, *Prime* has you scanning the world through Samus' visor to discover more about it, and a mysterious

The suit's visor is realised magnificently, all neon readings and translucent reflections – and makes screen-filling nasties look great

material called Phazon, before facing the Metroid Prime itself.

It's not just as a visual showcase that *Metroid Prime* sticks in the player's memory – though the lush tendrils and weird laboratories of Tallon IV brought the universe so vividly to life. It's because, more than ever before, the controls and the perspective put you in Samus' metallic boots – and they were just as quick, finessed and deadly as you'd ever imagined.



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

FORMAT: GAMECUBE DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS RELEASE: 2004

After destroying the Metroid Prime, Samus is sent to investigate the disappearance of marines on the planet of Aether. She finds them dead, slain by the monstrous Ing, parasites that thrive in darkness.

Echoes not only had the structure of the earlier title, but split the design and objectives across multiple dimensions. The opposition were more feral than ever, the Ing relentless, the Metroids evolving into deadlier and deadlier foes, yet the worst of all is... familiar.

The Metroid Prime has survived, but reformed in its conqueror's image. An eerie doppelganger that shadows your progress as well as impeding it, Dark Samus is mindless and fixed on destruction, with the means to achieve it.



Echoes features two races split between light and dark dimensions – and splits your weapons accordingly for effective combat

Refining both the interface and hub-and-spoke design that *Metroid Prime* had pioneered, *Echoes* stands apart as the most cerebral *Metroid*, chock-full of

Chozo lore, scannable environments and subtly shifting details. It asked a lot from players, but its challenge and depth repaid them in full.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

FORMAT: WII DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS RELEASE: 2007



Dark Samus infects the bounty hunter team, including Samus, with Phazon. It corrupts everything it touches, and is spreading



Phazon is ever-present in *Prime*, but not until *Corruption* does its true horror become clear. As part of a system-wide Space Pirate assault, Phazon is a contagion of terrifying efficiency, corrupting planets and scrambling the Galactic Federation.

Samus, along with other bounty hunters, tries to stem the tide. From the first steps, it was clear how different *Corruption's* world was – not least in how you looked at it.

The use of the Wii Remote to guide perspective was beautifully natural, a control scheme that found its perfect complement in *Metroid's* pacing: intense combat and pinpointing one minute, a considered look and slow sweeps

the next. *Prime's* fundamentals were accentuated, the lock-on targeting now the basis for a pinwheeling shooting gallery that demanded precision as well as quick reflexes.

After purging three planets, including the Space Pirate homeworld, Samus has her final showdown with Dark Samus – or the Metroid Prime – at the very source of Phazon. *Corruption* put a seal on the *Metroid Prime* trilogy, but it also set a standard for firstperson motion controls yet to be surpassed. The slick switches between alerts and attacks alongside its unique controls made *Corruption* a singular firstperson experience – and a tantalising starting point for *Other M*.

Metroid: Other M

FORMAT: WII PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NINTENDO/TEAM NINJA RELEASE: 2010

Having spent so much time alone with Samus Aran, traversing worlds and discovering alien life, it's surprising how little we really know her. A lone traveller, she's at once iconic and unknown, her backstory only alluded to in previous iterations and never fully exposed for all to see.

Team Ninja – the veteran studio of *Ninja Gaiden* fame – and Nintendo are aiming to rectify that. Set slap bang in the middle of the *Metroid* timeline, *Other M* is filling in the blanks not just of the story but of Samus' persona. Before you even step into her big yellow boots you're brought up close and personal with the planet-hopping heroine.

It's all rendered beautifully by animation house D-Rockets' lush cinematics, Samus' voice narrating the flow of the space opera acted out before you and providing a motivation for her quest that has previously been absent. The plot, one that begins with Samus defeating the Mother Brain of *Super Metroid*, is at once fan

Other M isn't all furious seek-and-destroy blasting: your time is divided by hacking and solving the puzzle that each area provides

service and refresher, bridging the gap between the 1994 classic and *Metroid Fusion*. It's a bold storytelling decision that takes things back to where they began in a bid to rekindle some of the platforming magic of old. There's also the added bonus of drawing in new players with its high-end production values and, soon after that beautiful destruction of Zebes, a unique synergy of gameplay styles.

The opening act alone is a compilation of previous entries, transitioning from the exploratory FPS from the



As ever, rockets are the most devastating trick up Samus' sleeve, dispensing with multiple targets and heating things up



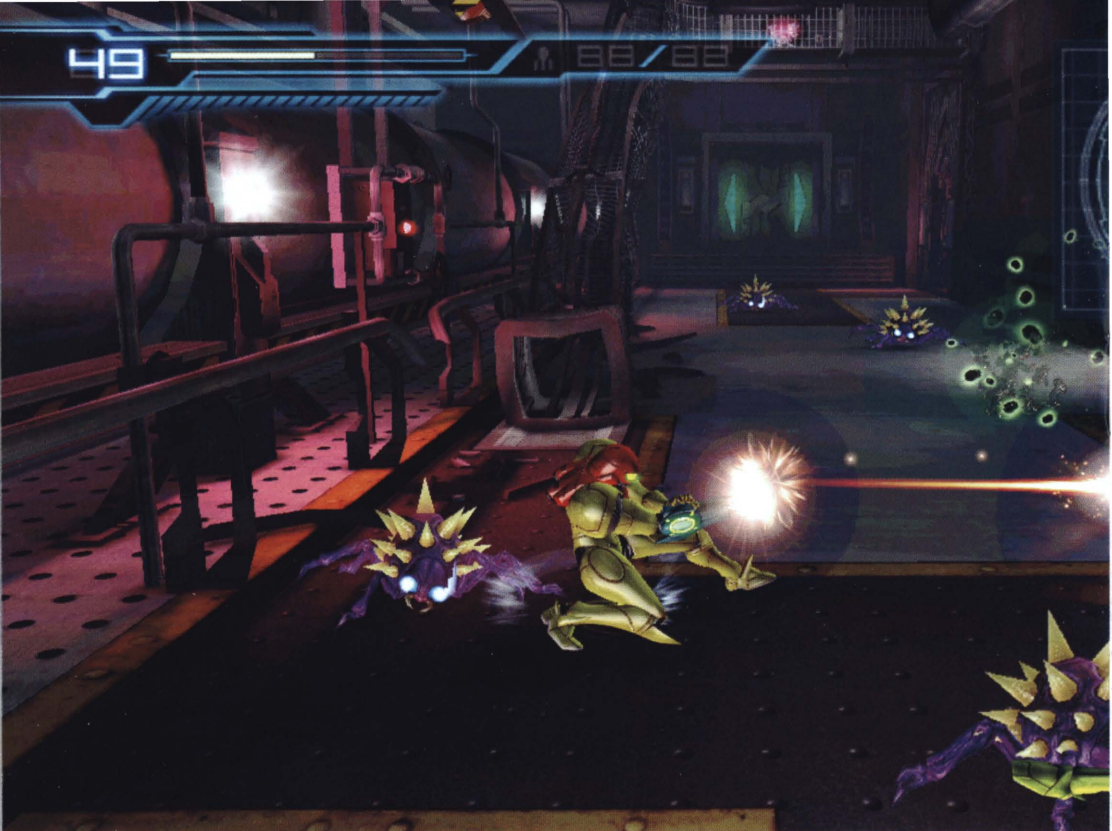
GameCube years to the sidescrolling sections of a long time ago. But there is also a wealth of new gameplay avenues being explored by the team behind action adventure classic *Ninja Gaiden*, not least putting Samus through her combat paces with an arsenal of close-quarters combos and special attacks. Counters now play a key role in maintaining health and the upper hand, with some traditional beat 'em up finishers to conclude battles and make you look good in a dynamic close-up. The acrobatics,



from spinning whirlwind kicks to skull-cracking flips, are unlike anything the series has seen before, lending urgency and vibrancy to battles and making Samus as much of a weapon as any in her inventory. And in that inventory, of course, there's the ability to roll into the morph ball and use any number of other fan favourites – with the promise of some new additions to round out the package.

In motion, *Other M* is a system shock, its gung-ho pace going against the measured





nature of the past games. Samus charges through the locales – populated by luminous undergrowth and buzzing with new species and threats – taking down hostiles with rapid-fire blasts and springing from platform to platform with ease and finesse. Encompassing multiple gameplay styles runs the risk of misjudging the camera: tailoring it only to sidescrolling

would put blinkers on a well-designed gameworld and neuter player agency. Fortunately, Team Ninja has managed to sidestep this landmine in a way it hasn't before. The camera, though fixed, is context sensitive and, crucially, appropriate for each area. Entering an enclosed space introduces a thirdperson camera, an incentive for exploration rather than combat, while

traversing open spaces brings a sweeping aerial view that gives a sense of the scale and scenery. If run-and-gun is the new buzzphrase, old-and-new is the best summary of the overall production. Though the crisp visuals are a delight, presenting one of the first truly inviting science-fiction worlds on Wii, it's all nestled firmly in the bosom of the past. It isn't all smash and grab, either. There are quiet times in what has been shown that require the famed combination of hunting and scanning in order to enable progress, breaking up any monotony that could hamper an all-out actioner of this sort and again displaying the quality and intricacy of level design for which *Metroid* is renowned.

The sound of a blast from Samus' hand-cannon, or the swoosh of a rocket, is like music to a veteran player's ears, and it's clear that the audio design,



The mini-map is a must for finding secrets – just don't expect any sympathy from respawning foes as you dash to the next area

In step with its new direction, *Other M*'s narrative involves an ensemble cast that adds a further layer of human interest



producer on *Other M* will ensure both a faithfulness to the canon and also a seal of design quality. Having fathered the series through generations of hardware and different strands of genre, it's not hyperbole to label *Other M* a new beginning. Each segment of gameplay has been reinvented with a new spin. Firstperson mode is initiated by moving the Wii Remote from its side-on position to pointing it at the screen. Side-scrolling is a 2.5D mixture of left-to-right sprinting and platforming. With Team Ninja consistently at the cutting edge of the action genre and Sakamoto's pedigree with the *Metroid* franchise, it's hard not to get excited by the prospect of this team-up. It's also

hard to deny the allure of Samus' secret origin and her graduation from bounty hunter to wanted woman. It's a new treat cooked from old recipes and looks set to draw on many of Samus' strengths while removing some of her weaknesses.

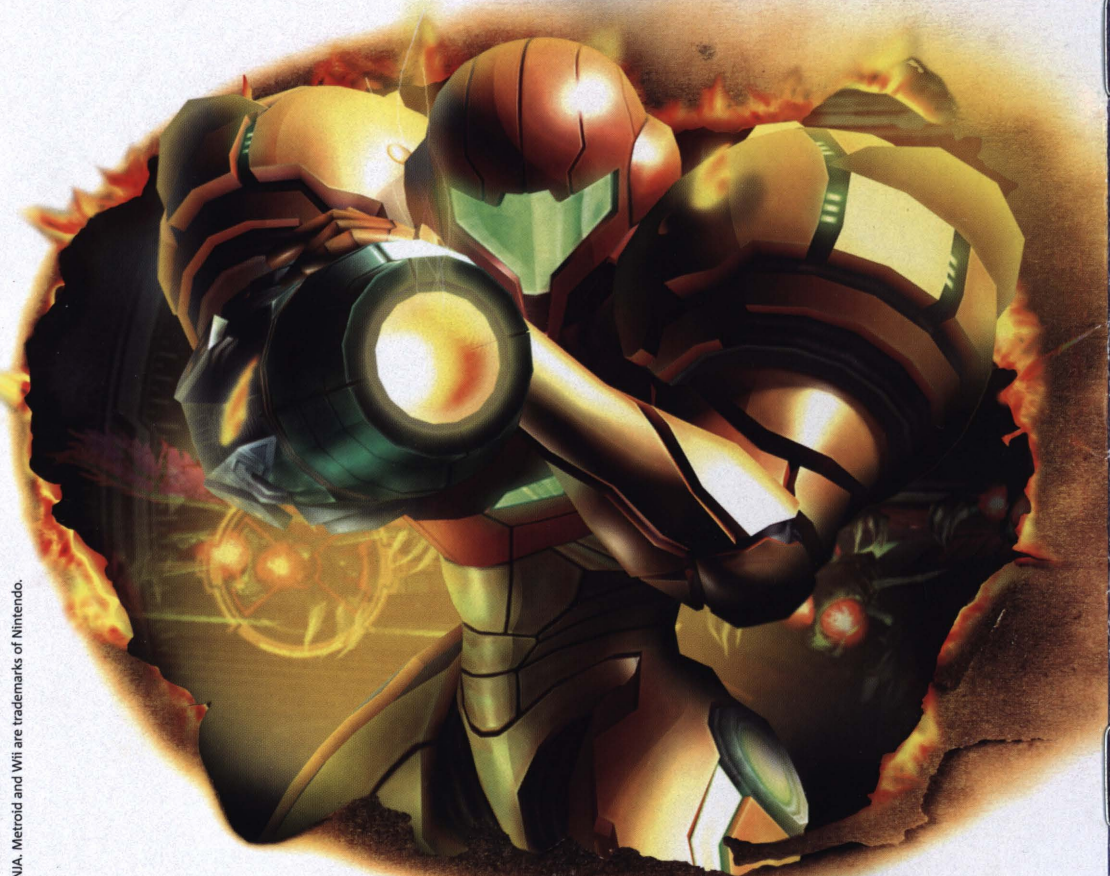
In drawing together so many aspects of the *Metroid* make-up, Nintendo and Team Ninja are experimenting with unfamiliar styles, confidently treading new ground. It's apt, then, that exploration is the cornerstone of the *Metroid* experience and, in parallel to Samus herself, this is a development team clearly ready to enter a brave new world.

Samus has a variety of hand-to-hand moves and grapples with influences ranging from wrestling to martial arts

evolved from *Metroid Prime* to *Corruption* in the series' 3D years, has also been inspired by what has gone before. The score helps, too, providing a shimmering orchestra that enhances a sense of the traditional overlaying the modern.

The real history of *Metroid*, of course, lies with Yoshio Sakamoto. A name familiar worldwide, Sakamoto has steered the franchise since its inception, and his role as





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